

INDOCHINA

POW Hope Raised—Briefly

For the relatives of U.S. prisoners of war, no news is bad news.

Last week, there was a dramatic report involving the possible release of 187 Americans being held by Hanoi, but it was uncertain whether the story was good news, or even any news at all.

A Swedish newspaper, the respected Dagens Nyheter, reported that the U.S. command in Saigon had arranged for the airlift this Thursday of 187 prisoners from Vientiane, Laos, to New York via Bangkok and Rome.

The story, which was team-written, quoted "confidential sources" saying that the prisoners would be released in Hanoi and then flown "probably with Russian planes" to Vientiane, where they would be put aboard a Scandinavian Airlines System jet.

Later, an SAS spokesman questioned about the report said that such an operation was being planned but added that "there has yet not been any contract signed and therefore no fixed time for the transport."

Everyone Denies It

But soon after the story appeared, it was being denied by almost everyone involved—including SAS.

Knut Hagrup, the airline's president, said the SAS public relations man who had confirmed the newspaper report lacked the background to handle "this sensitive thing in the middle of the night and no one regrets this incorrect statement more than he does."

Hagrup admitted that a "private person" had contacted the SAS representative in Frankfurt, West Germany, about such an operation. But he said the request was not taken "too seriously."

Speaking for the White House, Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler said that "the United States government has not been informed of any such plan nor have we participated in negotiating such a plan . . ."

Xuan Thuy, the chief North Vietnamese negotiator at the Paris peace talks, also discounted the story, accusing the Swedish newspaper of possessing "an excessive imagination."

Later, an unidentified West German businessman appeared on U.S. television and said he had talked to SAS officials about the availability of a plane and its cost.

The man, whose back was turned to the camera, said, "I was not acting as a spokesman for any American organization, neither private nor military, involved." But he

declined to say who he was for.

In Stockholm, Dagens Nyheter refused to back down, hinting that disclosure of the operation might have caused its cancellation.

"It is not unlikely that SAS, bowing to external pressure, has found it suitable to downgrade the importance of the flight," said Boerje Dahlqvist, the general news editor. "Our information has been very accurate."

Through all the confusion, one fact was brutally clear. The relatives of the estimated 500 American POWs had had their hopes raised, then flattened.

And the issue seemed as deadlocked as ever: Hanoi insisting upon a U.S. withdrawal deadline in exchange for the release of the POWs, Washington refusing to set a deadline.

While the stories from Stockholm were receiving most of the publicity, a report published by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee disclosed new information on the secret involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency in Laos.

The 23-page report said that the CIA has spent about \$70 million to operate an army of irregular forces numbering more than 30,000 in Laos during fiscal 1971—a larger involvement than was previously supposed.

Pentagon War Study

Meanwhile, the man who has admitted the leaking of the most controversial government report in recent years was ordered removed to California to face charges of illegal possession of secret government documents.

Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, who said he turned over the Pentagon study of the Vietnam war to the New York Times, was indicted under the Espionage Act of 1917. The warrant was issued in Los Angeles because the federal government contends Ellsberg had access to the secret documents as an employee of the Rand Corp., of Santa Monica.

On the congressional battlefield, the Senate put off until Sept. 13 consideration of a law extending the draft for two years.

The major point of contention between the House of Representatives and the Senate is an amendment to the bill dealing with the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam.

The old draft law has expired, but the Selective Service System drew lots of 1972 draft calls for men who turn 19 this year. Dec. 4 came first on the list, while Nov. 1 was 268th.

STATINTL